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SUBJECT: JOURNALIST FACES SLANDER CHARGES FOR ARTICLE
CRITICAL OF JORDAN'S PARLIAMENT

REF: 08 AMMAN 3116

[11](#). (U) Journalist Khaled Mahadin, who published an article critical of parliament on the Amman-based news website Khaberni.com in February, pled not guilty on March 30 to charges of slander. Mahadin's article, "For God's Sake, Abdullah," called for the dissolution of parliament and an end to "unlawful privileges for deputies" such as tax exemptions and access to Hajj visas. The article also accused lower house speaker Abdulhadi Majali of seeking scholarships and university slots for the children of MPs in his parliamentary bloc.

[12](#). (U) Mahadin was represented by Islamist lawyer Saleh Armouti in his first court appearance following the end of his tenure as the head of Jordan's Bar Association. If convicted, he could face three years in prison. The presiding judge adjourned the trial until April 21. The Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islamic Action Front and the pro-business, moderately pro-reform Ikha bloc have publicly called for the case against Mahadin to be dropped. On the day of the trial, protesters picketed parliament on Mahadin's behalf and sent a petition to Majali asking him to withdraw the lawsuit.

[13](#). (SBU) Comment: Mahadin's case stands in contrast to repeated statements by the King supporting freedom of expression. As recently as November 2008, the King went on the record during a meeting with journalists, saying that "there will be no detention of any journalists carrying out his or her duty." A new press and publications law was passed in 2007 which abolished imprisonment of journalists for ideological offenses, but the penal code (including the portions dealing with slander) leave open the possibility of jail time for journalists. The Jordan Press Association has so far failed to release a statement about Mahadin's case, as fellow journalists try to gauge where the political winds are blowing. Mahadin has attracted support from a wide variety of sources (MPs, Islamists, online comments on the story), but it is difficult to say if his case is attracting broader public sympathy. End Comment.
Beecroft